

HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the Meeting of the
Corporate and Performance Overview & Scrutiny Panel

Held at The Council Chamber

The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, LE16 7AG

On Thursday, 12 December 2024

Commencing at 18:30

Councillor Peter James (chair), Councillor Paul Dann, Councillor Rose Forman, Councillor David Gair (for Councillor Stuart Finan), Councillor Phil King, Councillor Michael Rickman.

Councillor Mark Graves (Portfolio Holder for Finance), Councillor Darren Woodiwiss (Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change)

Officers:

C. Mason - Director of Finance & S.151 Officer

N. Barnard – Head of Democratic Services, Elections & Monitoring Officer

H. Chadwick – Environmental Coordinator

K. Aitken - Business Planning Officer

Introductions

The Chair opened the meeting and asked Members and Officers to introduce themselves.

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillor Finan, who was substituted by Councillor Gair.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests

In relation to item 6, Councillor King declared that he was also a member of the County Council.

3. Performance Overview & Scrutiny Panel Minutes – 26.09.24

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Corporate and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel held on 26th September 2024 were agreed as an accurate record.

Following a question from Councillor King, Councillor Graves, as Finance Portfolio Holder, gave a statement about the Harborough District Leisure Trust, which has recently closed. Further consideration of this matter will be by the Services and Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel, rather than by this Panel.

4. Portfolio Holder Update

Portfolio Holder updates from Councillors Woodiwiss (Environmental and Climate Change) and Graves (Finance) were tabled.

Finance: the asset review of The Symington Building has been completed and discussed by Cabinet. Suggestions for use that had been considered, but discounted, included the conversion of some of the upstairs into residential accommodation and of the ground floor into a cinema. Neither of these suggestions were found to be viable. The occupancy rate at the Harborough Innovation Centre was 98%. Harborough Enterprise Centre had an occupancy rate of 88%. The footfall at the Market Hall was down in October but recovered in November. The completion of Plowman's Yard is on schedule. Cabinet will consider two reports in January relating to remedial works at the Market Hall and will also be considering the Draft Budget.

Environmental and Climate Change: work is under way with other agencies to establish the full extent of the impact of storm Bert. Residents and businesses affected by flooding are encouraged to report issues through Leicestershire County Council website. Council Officers have taken steps to ascertain the extent of the damage in Little Bowden. Details of Christmas parking arrangements have been given. The Friendship Park is moving towards the spreading of grass seeds. Bulbs and trees have been planted. More work is to be completed over the next few months. The enviro-crime team are running a littering campaign with other councils across Leicestershire.

The Chair invited questions on the update. Councillor King asked whether delays taking forward proposed remedial works for The Symington Building had had an impact on the costs of the work and the likely timetable. Councillor Graves responded that the

strategic review of the building as an asset had taken priority over the remedial works and that it was inevitable, but unavoidable, that delaying the remedial works would have led to some increase in cost. The Director of Finance reported that the two main areas of remedial work related to the brickwork of two faces of the building and to the windows, which needed renovation and the fitting of secondary glazing. Councillor King reminded the Panel that when the building had transformed around 2012, a Cabinet advisory group had been established to oversee progress on the works. The current proposed works might again give the opportunity to review the effectiveness of the civic suite and perhaps other members, and staff, could be involved in developing thoughts over this. Councillor Dann felt that much of the ground floor of the building was now redundant. Could another use be found for this area? Councillor Forman suggested that the space on the ground floor might provide a better location for the civic suite.

Councillor Forman asked what remaining options were for the use of the building. Councillor Graves responded that the asset review report had suggested a number of other options, but these will need further work to develop. The Director of Finance reported that other options included the development of affordable housing on the area of the car parks at the rear of the building (subject to the car parking strategy). There were also options relating to the tenancy and use of areas within the building that were due to be modelled.

The Chair asked for further details of the plan to take forward the future of the building. The Director of Finance stated that the programme was not yet defined, but that first priority was for the remedial works, which would progress alongside exploring the options for the internal use of the building.

Councillor King questioned whether, given that the scheme cost around £25K each year, free parking in Market Harborough over the Christmas period was an effective use of this money. He asked whether it was bringing in extra trade, or was just bringing in trade on a Saturday which would otherwise have happened on other days of the week. Councillor Woodiwiss responded that the figures were inconclusive, but he would look into this again. The footfall counters in the town have recently been changed, so comparable data will not be available until next year. Councillor Gair suggested that Harborough Chamber of Commerce be asked whether the arrangements over Christmas parking had an effect on trade within the town. Councillor Woodiwiss stated that the Chamber had been consulted and were in favour of the scheme. Councillor

King wondered if there was scope to have a conversation with the County Council regarding the bus partnership about whether there was scope for considering a scheme for subsidised bus routes over the Christmas period.

5. 2024/25 Performance Report – Financial (Outturn) and Corporate Performance Quarter 2 (Year ending 31 March 2025)

The Portfolio Holder for Finance introduced the report, which covered the financial outturn and corporate performance Quarter 2 for 2024/25 and drew the Panel's attention to the schedule of variances. The Panel had the opportunity to ask questions on the report and the following points were raised:

Councillor Dann asked about slippage in the capital budget contained within paragraph 3.8 of the report. Councillor Graves replied that this was a regular feature. With regard to the depot, options were being considered, and the new cemetery was proceeding. Procurement was under way for the food waste collection project. The Director of Finance explained how the budgetary reporting system worked and stated that the special projects element of the capital programme is kept aside in case anything urgent arises and has not therefore been committed yet. The new IT system has speeded up the expenditure side of reporting.

Councillor King noted that the Council had reduced expenditure, while maintaining income levels and had benefitted from higher interest rates. However, Planning has again seen a reduction in income. What is being done to understand the likely pipeline of Planning activity is likely to be? The Government decision on the MPPF means that Harborough District will have to take 723 new homes a year as a minimum, which will have a huge impact on the Council's planning work. The Chair agreed that he would speak to the Leader of the Council so that information is shared so that Members are kept abreast of developments in this area.

Councillor King raised a question about the number of reports displayed on the Pentana system's landing page and suggested that these be prioritized to make it clearer for Councillors. The Business Planning Officer said that this would be looked into. Councillor King asked whether the flood relief grants referred to in Appendix 6 to the report were still available. The Chair also asked if the grants would be able to go towards the costs of arranging barriers for some of the most affected properties. The Environmental Coordinator responded that this might be the case, but that she would

check.

Councillor Dann asked about the number of affordable housing completions reported on page 39 of the report. Councillor Graves referred to the recent decision by Leicestershire County Council, which would have a significant effect. The Chair asked for information on the Lutterworth Town Centre scheme; the Director of Finance reported that there was a time limit on the funding and that it would not slip.

Councillor Rickman asked for attendance figures for the Leisure Centres to be included in future versions of the report.

Councillor King enquired about the suppliers of the CCTV cameras. The Chief Executive had said that this was being looked into, but how far had this progressed, especially if the cameras have to be replaced if they are not compliant? The Director of Finance agreed to report on this, but that any effects would be limited. It was agreed that a report on this be brought back to a future meeting of the Panel.

Councillor King asked if the depot was going to be progressed and if there was a real likelihood that a suitable site would become available. Councillor Graves responded that it was on-going. The Director of Finance stated that the Council would persevere with this.

6. Climate Emergency Action Plan Annual report 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Environmental and Climate Change and the Environmental Coordinator introduced the annual report for the Climate Emergency Action Plan 2023/24. The Panel had the opportunity to ask questions on the report and the following points were raised:

Councillor Forman noted that there was no mention of buses and public transport within the report, and no mention of active travel, for example the effect of walking to school. Also, was there more information on the EV charging hub? The Environmental Coordinator replied that buses did not fall within the responsibilities of the Council, but car clubs were considered. Regarding active travel, work was undertaken with schools and also with Leicestershire County Council's 'Choose How You Move'. The EV charging hub will be located in the Commons Car Park in Market Harborough and will include six double-headed chargers, with battery storage and an element of renewable energy. Councillor Gair noted that Lutterworth had been campaigning for some time to improve the bus services to Market Harborough and Rugby, and also to improve cycling

and walking within the town. He felt that information on commuter patterns would be very useful. The Environmental Coordinator agreed to look into the availability of travel data. Councillor Rickman noted that villages were in rural locations and had higher emissions in part because there were no rural bus services, and using cars was the only option. He also asked about progress with the installation of solar panels on the Harborough Innovation Centre; the Environmental Coordinator reported that this project was now completed and its effect would be included in next year's report.

Councillor Rickman asked about data relating to the use of the Tilton Car Club, and also for further information on the potential new rural car clubs that were mentioned in the report. The Environmental Coordinator reported that the Tilton Car Club currently had around twenty-five members including some volunteer drivers. Four rural car clubs are to be set up elsewhere within Leicestershire, but there is one group in Harborough that is currently down as a reserve. Hopefully, these clubs will generate further interest in other areas, so that additional funding can be sought. At Councillor Rickman's suggestion, the Environmental Coordinator agreed to circulate details of the Tilton Car Club to other parishes.

Councillor King drew attention to the enhanced bus partnership operated by the County Council and indicated that the Government had confirmed further funding to the County Council for this scheme. There was a bus partnership users' group in which members of the public could become involved. Councillor King noted that the report indicated that the District Council was moving in the right direction, but that it should concentrate on areas where there was a realistic ability for it to make a difference. Councillor Woodiwiss responded that the Climate Emergency Action Plan was to be reviewed this year and identify a pathway for what could be achieved over the next five years. Councillor Dann drew attention to the increase in population between 2011-2021 that was included in the report, but no projection was included for the number of cars in the future. This was likely to be a major problem and further research was needed. The Environmental Coordinator stated that National Grid had projections on this.

The Chair asked whether data was available regarding the use of hybrid cars, and whether anything was being done to encourage EV use among the Council's staff, either through a salary-sacrifice scheme to assist in the purchase of electric vehicles, or in the provision of charging points. The Environmental Coordinator responded that the Council was looking into a salary-sacrifice scheme and that data on hybrid cars

could be considered for future reports.

7. Corporate and Performance Overview and Scrutiny Panel Draft

Workplan

The Chair invited comments on the draft workplan. Councillors Forman and King commented on the number of items included on the draft workplan. Councillor King suggested that some items might best be taken forward by task and finish groups, rather than as meetings of the full Panel. The Head of Democratic Services, Elections & Monitoring Officer noted that work relating to the Scrutiny function was being integrated into the job descriptions of Democratic Services posts that were being recruited for. Where a task and finish group was established, it would be up to the parent Panel to decide on its terms of reference and agree its membership. Councillor King suggested that the review of the car-parking ticket machines might be an appropriate area to be considered by a task and finish group. The Chair agreed to take these issues up with officers. The Head of Democratic Services, Elections & Monitoring Officer suggested that all members of the Panel should be contacted to ask what they would like the Panel to consider and also to consider the best way in which Members could become involved.

8. To consider any urgent items (to be decided by the Chairman)

There were none.

The meeting ended at 21:00